

Listening to the Forest

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Streamed video essay <https://film.oslomet.no/listening-to-the-forest>

Introduction to video essay

Listening to the forest is a streamed video essay in which you are invited to pay attention to audiovisual relations between human, landscape and moving image. Moving images are explored through a camera-based field recording practice that emphasises them as part of an ecological materiality, inseparable from what they depict and how they are seen.

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Rendering a forest as a visual site, a landscape, while collaborating with it in developing sounds and images, the essay explores how human management is inseparable from the conditions of the forest itself. It engages with Swedish forestry and its ecological consequences, and with the precariousness of relations between human and non-human through practices of attention (Ingold, 2015) and listening (Voegelin, 2012). Nature appears as compromised through plantation and its consequences, and at the same time as a cinematic collaborator, enabling the relationships that produce the images, relations between the life of the forest, bodies, and devices.

In a similar gesture the images are also treated as a site, not separate from the relations of the world it is depicting, but part of its ongoing processes and emerging in a network of interactions (Røed, 2014). Drawing upon the long history of framing in cinema (Gunning, 1994), the video plays with stillness and movement, panoramic motion, algorithmic automation, topographical thinking as well as structural strategies such as juxtaposition. For example, a split between juxtaposed images breaks the spatiality of the image as well as the verticality of the forest's tree trunks while expanding the visual field, allowing the trunks to stretch further up, out of one visual field and into the next.

By appropriating the concept of *field* from certain discourses of sound art (Voegelin, 2014; Benson & Montgomery, 2018) and applying it to the moving image, this research explores the capacity of video-based art for enabling movement, transience, and body; in other words, elements of performance characteristic to site (Kwon 2004, Kaye 2000). By considering how the moving image might be seen as a form of site in itself, it explores how the moving image can manifest as place on its own terms rather than as a mode of representing reality.

In a context of artistic practice, I ask how activities of listening and paying attention occurring through the moving image can be applied as a specific methodology to explore specific surroundings and to create artworks that operate across any dialectic opposition between experience, mediation, and representation, as a form of placemaking?

Leaving behind phenomenological appreciation of being immersed in a natural world and breaking with the aesthetics of the avant-garde, where the materiality of the medium is in a separate position disconnected from the relations of the world, the essay seeks to share a methodology where research occurs in a thick materiality

through the situated practice of video art as it developed as a form of inquiry. (Bijvoet, 1997).

Keywords: video art, attention, field recording

About the author

Ellen J. Røed, PhD, is a visual artist and professor in Film and media at Stockholm University of the Arts. Characterized by her devotion towards interdisciplinary forms, temporality and performativity, Røed's artistic research has evolved through particular experimentation with moving images, often in transdisciplinary contexts. Operating as artist, artistic researcher and educator, she is exploring performative and networked aspects of images through collaborative artistic practice.

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